Other whales

North Sea

According to Fordyce and De Muizon, cetaceans are a diverse monophyletic group of obligate marine mammals with a long and informative fossil record from many localities (1937). The primary diet of most cetaceans in the North Sea consists of fish, cephalopods and sometimes small invertebrates (Gilles et al., 2023). In general, cetaceans are migratory by nature (De la Vega, 2016). This study found 17 different species of cetacean in the North Sea (Ducrotoy et al., 2000; Evans, 1988; Gilles et al., 2023; Greater North Sea Mammals, n.d.; Van Der Meij & Camphuijsen, 2006). Of the 17 species of cetacean, only four are considered common (Ducrotoy et al., 2000; Evans, 1988; Gilles et al., 2023; Post, 2022; Van Der Meij & Camphuijsen, 2006). These common species are: Harbour porpoise, Bottlenose dolphin (Tursiops truncates), White-beaked dolphin (Lagenorhynchus albirostris), and Minke whale (Balaenoptera acutorostrata) (Ducrotoy et al., 2000; Gilles et al., 2023; Post, 2022; Van Der Meij & Camphuijsen, 2006). Other cetacean species in the North Sea are considered uncommon or rarely seen and they include: Humpback whale (Megaptera novaeangliae), Sperm whale (Physeter macrocephalus), Striped dolphin (Stenella coeruleoalba), Common dolphin (Delphinus delphis), and Killer whale (Orcinus orca) (Evans, 1988; Gilles et al., 2023; Post, 2022; Van Der Meij & Camphuijsen, 2006). As Harbour porpoise, Common bottlenose dolphin and Minke whale are discussed separately. They will not be mentioned here. There are no known invasive cetaceans in the North Sea.

History/ Population trends

Killer whales are widely distributed in British and Irish waters, occurring particularly along the Atlantic seaboard and in the northern North Sea (Evans, 1988). The species is rare or absent from the southern North Sea and eastern part of the Channel (Evans, 1988). Its presence in coastal waters is seasonal, mainly between April and September, possibly associated with inshore movements of spawning Atlantic salmon and herring (Evans, 1988). This may be followed by an offshore movement associated with mating/calving in late autumn and winter (Evans, 1988). Single animals are most commonly seen, and groups usually number less than eight individuals (Evans, 1988). Single animals are mainly subadults or adult males whilst pods comprise groups of adult females and sub-adults, usually accompanied by a single adult male (Evans, 1988). There is little evidence for any marked change in status of killer whales in the region (Evans, 1988). Current conservation status is discussed, remaining knowledge gaps are identified, and priorities for future research are outlined (Evans, 1988; Jourdain et al., 2019).

Miscellaneous

- In scientific classification, whales, dolphins and porpoises are all grouped under the order Cetacea (Forest, 2020). The word cetacean comes from Greek and translates as “sea monster” (Forest, 2020).

Diet

- Sandeel (Gilles et al., 2023)
- Herring (Gilles et al., 2023)
- Mackerel (Gilles et al., 2023)
- Sprat (Gilles et al., 2023)
- Flatfish (Gilles et al., 2023)
- Cod (Gilles et al., 2023)
- Whiting (Gilles et al., 2023)
- Small fish (Gilles et al., 2023)
- Harbour seal (Evans, 1988. Jourdain et al., 2019)
- Grey seal (Evans, 1988. Jourdain et al., 2019)
- Anglerfish (Gilles et al., 2023)
- Cephalopods (Gilles et al., 2023)
- Crustaceans (Gilles et al., 2023)
- Other detritivores (Gilles et al., 2023)
- Zooplankton (Gilles et al., 2023)
- Rays and Skates (Gilles et al., 2023)
- Sharks (Gilles et al., 2023)
- Other pelagic active hunters (Gilles et al., 2023)
- Other demersal active hunters (Gilles et al., 2023)
- Other ambush hunters (Gilles et al., 2023)

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